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SUBJECT: COALITION OF OPPOSITION PARTIES THREATEN BOYCOTT

Classified By: Political Counselor Russell J. Hanks for reasons 1.5 (B & D).

¶1. (U) Citing a lack of confidence in the Independent Election Commission's (INEC) ability to organize free and fair elections, the Conference of Nigeria Political Parties (CNPP) threatened to boycott the 2007 elections unless major changes were made to the composition of the election commission and its election calendar.

¶2. (U) The boycott threat was issued by the CNPP Chairman, former governor of Kaduna State, Alhaji Abdulkadir Balarabe Musa at a press conference on June 28 in Abuja. The CNPP press conference was attended by representatives of a dozen small opposition parties. Musa expressed a lack of confidence in INEC's election preparation so far and questioned whether adequate change could happen without major restructuring.

¶3. (U) Lack of preparation and the politicization of INEC diminished its credibility, Musa said. Failed efforts so far to register voters had reinforced the perception that INEC could not organize credible elections, and that its electoral calendar was deficient because it provided for only a month between elections and the resolution of any resulting disputes. This was a recipe for disaster and, Musa said, his coalition would be set to also organize protests of faulty elections, should they occur.

¶4. (U) In order to avoid a boycott, the CNPP was demanding that INEC be disbanded and the new body, headed by a retired Supreme Court Justice with other members nominated by a committee of all political parties, be appointed. CNPP also insisted that the representatives of the registered political parties must work in partnership with INEC to facilitate credible elections.

¶5. (C) Comment: The CNPP's threat to boycott the 2007 elections reflects a general perception that INEC has done little to build confidence in the electoral process. The proposal to disband INEC and appoint a credible former chief justice as its head is highly unlikely, although it would be a practical remedy to raise confidence. In order to fundamentally remake INEC the National Assembly would have to draft and pass new legislation. While such a change would increase the likelihood of credible elections and muster popular support, it would also risk extending the already shaky election calendar.

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